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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000804

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MALIKI'S CALL FOR "RECONCILIATION" STIRS BA'THIST  
PARANOIA

REF: A. GMP20090307649002  
[1](#)B. GMP20090315648002  
[1](#)C. GMP20090319642001  
[1](#)D. GMP20090321688001  
[1](#)E. BAGHDAD 000731

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Rivals of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki are using his recent call for "national reconciliation" to score political points by portraying him as soft on the loathed Ba'th Party. As a consequence, Maliki's office has been on the defensive, clarifying that the government distinguishes Saddam-era criminals from the unblemished former Ba'th members who remain outside the political process. Maliki opponents fear that the PM will ruthlessly use any available alliance to ambitiously cling to power, which is stoking paranoia about Maliki's intentions toward the Ba'thists. End summary.

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Maliki's Call for Political Reconciliation . . .  
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[1](#)2. (U) On March 7 Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki delivered a televised speech calling for, in broad strokes, "national reconciliation" that brings all of Iraq's components into a political process (ref A). Soon after the speech, regional media began running stories that Maliki wished to hold talks with members of the Ba'th Party, even though Maliki's speech did not mention such an idea. A reporter from Al Jazeera, for example, said Maliki wanted to cooperate with Ba'thists because he was being pressured by the U.S. to do so and that he wanted to "reap more gains" before national elections (ref B) by presumably allying himself with the party.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Since the speech, the Prime Minister's Office has been publically defending itself for allegedly softening its stance on the Ba'th Party. On March 19 the PMO issued a statement that said the "terrorist" Ba'th Party "will never be a partner in the political process" but that its untarnished former members should reenter the political process (ref C).

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. . . Used to Score Political Points  
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[1](#)4. (C) Maliki's detractors -- especially the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) -- have spun the March 7 speech to paint Maliki as someone willing to use the loathed (and feared) Ba'th Party for his own aggrandizement. In a March 15 meeting, Ammar al-Hakim, the son and likely successor to ISCI chairman Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, told PMIN that Ba'thists are Iraq's gravest threat and that they must not be allowed to reenter government. Ammar claimed 1,700 Ba'thists (dangerously) remain officers in the Iraqi Army. "You don't know them like we do," Ammar told PMIN, suggesting these Ba'thists could launch a coup d'etat with little warning. Moreover, once American troops leave Iraq, American

commitment to Iraq's constitution and democratic system would be an open question. PMIN rejoined that our support for and commitment to Iraq's constitutional system was now a longstanding policy. He urged al-Hakim to think about how Iraqi leaders could build a space in Iraq for former Baathists so that they would be loyal to the system like other citizens.

¶5. (U) Friday sermons in ISCI-affiliated mosques on March 20 continued to dig at Maliki by highlighting the continuing danger of Ba'thists. A preacher at the Buratha Mosque in Baghdad was quoted on ISCI-affiliated media saying, "achieve reconciliation with whom, with those who killed us in the past and still kill us now? What do they want from reconciliation? . . . Our viewpoint on this issue is that we should be relentless with the murderers of the Iraqi people." Qshould be relentless with the murderers of the Iraqi people." Another ISCI cleric during his sermon said the Ba'thists should not return because the Iraqi people had already rejected them (ref D).

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Government Sees Utility in Reconciliation  
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¶6. (C) Maliki's supporters have responded by arguing that the government distinguishes between those forced to join the Ba'th Party under Saddam Hussein and those responsible for Ba'th-era criminality. Two members of the government's De-Ba'thification Committee, Abd al-Aziz al-Wandawi and Abbas al-Jabbar, during a March 22 meeting with Poloffs, offered a surprisingly conciliatory tone toward Ba'thists. Both were satisfied with the incomplete implementation of the 2008

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Justice and Accountability Law -- also known as De-Ba'th reform -- because if the law were fully implemented, they said, around 7,000 Ba'thists would be purged from the security services, depriving Iraq of essential talent. Wandawi and Jabbar proudly told Poloffs that their committee only rejected 65 of 15,000 candidates for provincial councils for their Ba'thists affiliation. Both asked for "moral support" from the U.S. for a tentative conference in Baghdad during which ex-Ba'thists would apologize to the Iraqi people and be forgiven in return.

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) Recognizing Maliki's potential cooperation with Sunni nationalist figures like Salih al-Mutlaq (ref E), ISCI probably is trying to expose Maliki to the consequences of such a move: alienating a Shi'a constituency who remain fearful of a Ba'thist resurgence and who are apt to conflate ambitious Sunnis with Ba'thists. Maliki's seemingly mundane March 7 speech gave these rivals an excuse to score political points against the prime minister. Meanwhile, politicians like Mutlaq who are pushing for Sunni detainee releases and a softer policy toward former Ba'th members, have little faith that Maliki will actually take concrete steps to reintegrate Ba'th members into Iraqi society. End comment.  
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